

Self-Determination and Inclusion: The Role of Canadian Principals in Catalyzing Inclusive-Positive Practices

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Abstract

While the placement of students with complex learning needs in Canadian classrooms may be mandated in policy, the development of inclusive-positive practices requires direct, and at times delicate, support and encouragement from principals. Without genuine engagement and buy-in from school staff, students in inclusive classrooms may not find meaningful opportunities in those spaces. The framework of self-determination theory provides a path by which principals can catalyze attitudinal changes (autonomy), best practices (competences), and enriched community relationships (relatedness). This study includes interviews with 21 principals. The findings of this study suggest that affecting attitudinal changes requires specific and comprehensive practices.

Keywords: principals; special education needs; inclusion; attitudes; self-determination theory

Introduction

Canadian classrooms are more heterogenous than ever. While it can be difficult to make broad statements about Canada's inclusive educational policy because educa-

Jeffrey William Harris MacCormack, Steve Sider, Kimberly Maich, & Jacqueline Ann Specht. (2021). Self-Determination and Inclusion: The Role of Canadian Principals in Catalyzing Inclusive-Positive Practices. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership* 17(2). URL: <http://journals.sfu.ca/ijepl/index.php/ijepl/article/view/1057> doi:10.22230/ijepl.2021v17n2a969

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tional policies are developed at provincial and territorial levels (Harpell & Andrews, 2010), all provincial and territorial ministries of education in Canada have adopted formal inclusive practices or initiated inclusive-aligned policies (McCrimmon, 2015). The shift from specialized educational placements to inclusive education has been difficult on teachers, who experience stress and burnout (Chaplain, 2008; Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). A large proportion of teachers report being very stressed or extremely stressed (Gray, Wilcox, & Nordstokke, 2017), and they regularly list pupil diversity and classroom management among the top stress-causing factors (e.g., McCormick & Barnett, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015; Stoeber & Rennert, 2008).

Fortunately, teachers are not alone in their efforts to create inclusive learning spaces; principals, vice-principals, and other educational leaders (henceforth only the term “principals” will be used) are allies in those efforts. There is little dispute that the principal can influence the instructional practices and attitudes of teachers when it comes to inclusive education (Eyal & Roth, 2010; Furney, Aiken, Hasazi, & Clarke/Keefe, 2005; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010; Yan & Sin, 2015). They are, in fact, an utmost necessity in supporting teachers to be inclusive (Harpell & Andrews, 2010). Understanding the perspectives and experiences of principals is important for the goal of identifying strategies by which school leaders can support teachers in inclusive practices.

Literature review

This study uses self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2017) as a framework for understanding the means by which principals influence the inclusive teaching practices of teachers on their staff. SDT is an evidence-based macro theory of motivation, development, and well-being that is focused on the socio-contextual factors that facilitate healthy psychological development and self-motivation (Dattilo, Mogle, Lorek, Freed, & Frysinger, 2018; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). It has been applied across myriad domains, such as parenting (Katz, Madjar, & Harari, 2014), educational leadership (Eyal & Roth, 2011), adolescent healthy behaviours (Hardy, Dollahite, Johnson, & Christensen, 2015), and elder care (Dattilo, Mogle, Lorek, Freed, & Frysinger, 2018), to name a few.

The current study looks to understand principal leadership strategies for inclusive education through the applications of two SDT mini-theories: basic psychological needs theory (Ryan & Deci, 2017) and organismic integration theory (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The analysis is framed around two tenets of SDT. First, humans are healthiest when their psychological needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy are satisfied. Second, humans are healthiest when their motivations are internalized (autonomous). Because teachers must be motivated to facilitate inclusive practices (Pantić & Florian, 2015), and because of the significant influence principals have over the attitudes and behaviour of teachers (Edmunds & Macmillan, 2010; Irvine, Lupart, Loreman, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010), the SDT framework may clarify how principals’ leadership decisions enrich or impoverish teachers’ efforts to incorporate inclusive practices.

Providing explications of the various SDT mini-theories would go far beyond the resources of the current study (for in-depth descriptions, see the comprehensive

work on the subject by Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci [2017]). The current study frames interviews with principals within the mini-theories of basic psychological needs and organismic integration.

Basic psychological needs theory

Fundamental to SDT is the notion that basic psychological needs are *essential nutrients* for growth and development (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Those psychological needs are for competence (also, effectance) (White, 1959), relatedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and autonomy, or “greater integration within the self” (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 242). *Competence* refers to the experience of feeling effective within one’s social context. The need for competence is met by feeling empowered to express and expand on one’s abilities (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Robert White (1959) described the need for competence as a desire to have an effect on one’s environment. The fulfillment of the need for competence is characterized by inherent striving, and is fuelled by curiosity and volition. Unfortunately, competence is easily foiled if a task is considered too difficult, if received criticism is too harsh, or by interpersonal factors, such as social comparisons.

Relatedness refers to being able to be sensitive and responsive to others and perceiving that others are sensitive and responsive. In short, the need for relatedness is met when people feel as if they belong within a community. *Autonomy* refers to the need to feel self-endorsed and to engage in activities willingly. In spite of how often the word autonomy is considered synonymous with independence or isolation, it does not refer to independence or being apart in SDT, as independence can be motivated by either autonomous or heteronomous factors (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The need for autonomy is met when motivation for one’s actions is driven from volitional factors and not controlled by either internal or external pressures.

Need fulfillment is an important consideration for principals because their effectiveness in supporting the practices of their teachers is predicted by how well they support the fulfillment of their teachers’ psychological needs (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Employees are healthier, happier, and work harder when their efforts to fulfill their basic motivational needs are supported within their workplace (e.g., Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Considering the significant influence that principals have over contextual factors in the education workplace, the current study examines principals’ perceptions of workplace tasks (inclusive education) and managerial behaviours (principal practice) in relation to motivation and work outcomes—topics that have been highlighted for future research by Edward Deci, Anja Olafsen, and Richard Ryan (2017). Understanding basic psychological needs theory also requires an understanding of autonomy support. Of the three psychological needs, autonomy support has a uniquely central role to play within need fulfillment. That is not to suggest that autonomy is more important a factor than relatedness and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2017); the three factors are interdependent, not hierarchical. Instead, autonomy is important because it is a necessary prerequisite for people to actively satisfy their needs. The second proposition of basic psychological needs theory is that the satisfaction of psychological needs is facilitated by autonomy support and disrupted by controlling contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

According to SDT, there are important differences between intrinsic motivation (doing something for its own sake) and extrinsic motivation (doing something for an instrumental reason). Whereas much of SDT emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation for overall well-being, organismic integration theory focuses on the four types of regulation within extrinsic motivation and their causes and consequences. While it is true that people are at their best when they are intrinsically motivated, not all forums include factors that catalyze intrinsic motivation. People regularly engage in activities that are not intrinsically motivating, such as chores, rituals, obligations, and exercising self-restraint, to name a few; people engage in these behaviours at least in part because of the separable and instrumental value of those behaviours. While some fortunate employees find themselves intrinsically motivated for some aspects of their work, for most of the work completed by employees in various sectors, including education, tasks completed for payment are, by definition, extrinsically motivated. According to SDT, extrinsic motivation is differentiated along a spectrum of four types of regulation: external, introjected, identified, and integrated. Detailed explanations of the differences among the regulation types of extrinsic motivation go beyond the scope of the current study (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017), but the following descriptions are offered as a primer of the types of regulation within extrinsic motivation.

External regulation is characterized by behaviour that is entirely regulated by external reward or punishment contingencies. Because external regulation requires separable consequences, behaviours are quickly abandoned if the contingencies are not reliable. For example, the regulation of teachers to support students with complex learning needs may be considered external if those teachers are only willing to teach those students under threat of job loss. Teachers who are externally regulated tend to be fully supportive of students only when being directly monitored.

Introjected regulation is the process by which people are freed from external forms of behaviour contingencies and, instead, feel pressured from internalized beliefs. The pressure one feels to be a certain way is often experienced as a set of “should” beliefs (e.g., this is what I *should* do), but the fundamental rationale for the behaviour is not internalized. For example, a teacher who facilitates inclusive practices only because of a sense of duty is doing so because of introjected regulation. Compliance with the internal demands may provide some sense of self-satisfaction, what Ryan and Deci (2017) refer to as “false self esteem” (p. 186), but acting on introjected regulation can drain one’s vitality and self-worth.

Identified regulation is characterized by a volitional endorsement of the purpose and goals of a particular behaviour. An example of identified regulation within inclusive teaching would be teachers who supports inclusive practices because they believe those practices have worth and value for the students.

Integrated regulation is the most autonomous type of extrinsic regulation. Achieving integrated regulation is a transformative process, by which an externally imposed action becomes fully volitional. Teachers who have achieved integrated regulation when it comes to inclusive practices do so in a way that reflects that inclusive practices are entirely congruent with otherwise held values and perspectives. Those beliefs are resilient to difficulties and unlikely to change even if leadership changes.

In light of the intricacy of contemporary work environments, it should be no surprise that much research has focused on the work done by supervisors as they support employees. According to Deci, Olafsen, and Ryan (2017), leaders who are interested in improving the performance and well-being of employees should a) promote feelings of competence and confidence among their employees (need for competence), b) allow employees to try new things and not feel pressured to behave in specific ways (need for autonomy), and c) create spaces where employees feel connected to each other and their supervisors (need for relatedness). Employees whose supervisors provide autonomy-supportive behaviours tend to report less pressure, express improved job satisfaction, and have greater trust in the organization (Fernet, Guay, Sec  cal, & Austin, 2012). Autonomy-supportive behaviours also include encouraging self-initiation, acknowledging employees' viewpoints, assigning tasks that are optimally challenging, and providing a rationale when assigning work tasks (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017).

In summary, understanding the factors of need fulfillment and autonomous forms of extrinsic motivation is important because the purpose of the current study is to understand, through an analysis of the perspectives and anecdotes of principals, the means by which principals support and hinder their teachers' internalization of inclusive attitudes and practices. As will be explained, not all of the behaviours and attitudes expressed by the principals in the study align with internalization and need fulfillment. As with any workplace, the behaviours and management styles of principals may influence teachers' behaviour, but internalization is not considered effective unless the individuals assimilate and enact the behaviour on their own. The current study provides an analysis of the perspectives of principals through an SDT framework as an effort to address the need for future research highlighted by Deci, Olafsen, and Ryan (2017), who asked for examinations of concrete workplace tasks and characteristics in relation to motivation and work outcomes.

Method

The current study examined the professional learning and day-to-day experiences that school principals identified as having a significant effect on how they supported students with special education needs in inclusive schools. Participants were recruited from across Canada to include as many of the educational jurisdictions, which are organized by province and territory, as possible. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participants (see Table 1). Participants were identified by the research team to ensure that the sampling included a balance of males and females, English and French speakers, and elementary and secondary school settings, and that each of the provinces selected for this study was represented. Questions probed for a deeper understanding of the types of day-to-day experiences that principals had with supporting students with special education needs and to uncover significant experiences that had influenced principals' perspectives on inclusion. The participants were not asked questions specific to the SDT framework in order to reveal the extent to which SDT factors (needs fulfillment, extrinsic regulation) originated organically from the interviews. All interviews were conducted by members of the research team, were semi-structured, and were digitally recorded. Transcripts from the interviews were returned to the participants for member checking.

Table 1. Demographics of interview participants (N = 21)

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Interview participants	Number of interview participants
Principals & vice-principals	21
Elementary schools; secondary schools	16; 5
English; French	17; 4
Number of school systems represented	18
Provinces represented	6*

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Note: *AB, BC, ON, NB, NL, & QC

Once member checking was complete, transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using a constant comparison method (Boeije, 2002). Using an exploratory method, the research team attached descriptive phrases to units of text (e.g., supporting staff, emotional component). Those descriptive phrases were aggregated to produce code definitions. At every stage of the analysis, the researchers returned to the original transcripts to ensure that the thematic coding reflected the ethos of the interviews. In the end, the thematic codes were collapsed into three main findings that inform the remainder of this article. The interviews were also coded in alignment with the types of extrinsic regulation: “external,” “introjected,” and “identified/integrated.” See Table 2 for a code description and examples of transcript quotes

Table 2. Code descriptions and transcript examples

Regulation type	External (controlled)	Introjected (controlled)	Identified* (autonomous)	Integrated* (autonomous)
Description	“Dependence of the behaviour is because of an external contingency ... people perform the behaviour because they expect a separable consequence.” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 184)	“An introject is experienced as a demanding and controlling force, albeit an internal one, acting on the self—a sense that one ‘should’ or ‘must’ do something.” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 185)	“Identifications are defined by a conscious endorsement of values and regulations ... they see it as something personally important for themselves.” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 187)	“Integrated regulation entails that one bring a value or regulation into congruence with other aspects of one’s self ... one can experience a more wholehearted endorsement of the behaviour or value.” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 188)
Characteristics	Highlights separable outcomes (salary, employment) Emphasizes that inclusive practices are part of the job	Utilizes obligation language (should, must) Connects inclusive practice with values already internalized by teacher (student safety, social justice)	Language suggests that inclusive-positive attitudes are personally and deeply valued by teacher Attitudes toward inclusion go beyond job requirements; teacher has internalized inclusive-positive attitudes	
Example	“This kid brings in the money to pay for your paycheque. So, if you don’t want this kid, you don’t want a paycheque.”	“I have a tendency to go with, let’s take a look at what we are required to do by ministry mandate and by board policy. And then let’s take a look at what we can do. And what we should do, right?”	“When we chose to go into teaching, we believed in the potential of children, and we believed in our ability to teach students and then at times we may have been disillusioned. It still takes a lot of managerial courage because, unfortunately, there are teachers who have lost sight of this, this vision, and then believe less in their ability and easily feel helpless. So we have to be very, very, very available to support, accompany, encourage, help a teacher who is experiencing difficulties with a child.”	

Notes: *To reflect the difficulty that comes with inferring the difference between identified and integrated regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation were collapsed into one theme, as has been done in other analyses (e.g., Eyal & Roth, 2010).

Findings

The findings are organized by the two research questions and the themes that came from the analysis. The first research question, “To what extent do principals support the psychological needs of their teaching staff?” is examined by exploring each need: a) competence, b) relatedness, and c) autonomy. The second research question, “Which extrinsic motivation approaches do principals use to catalyze inclusive-positive attitudes and practices within their teaching staff?” is examined through three themes: a) external regulation, b) introjected regulation, and c) identified/integrated regulation. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Competence

As noted earlier, inclusive practices are complex, and teachers must be adequately trained to be effective inclusive educators. Principals reported that their first priority for facilitating inclusive schools was to recruit or train competent staff members. For example, Abram stated, “It goes back to teachers actually having the knowledge and the skills to implement programs and programming to be inclusive.” Ethan said that principals need educational teams “with really good skill sets.” Michaela noted that when the school team demonstrates inclusive practices, it can contribute to “collective efficacy [which] is so important in a school.” Primrose reported that she is “on the hunt all the time looking for the best staff.” If hiring competent inclusive educators is not a possibility, the principals said that it is the principal’s job to teach the staff inclusive practices. Principals noted that when they see educators using poor teaching practices, they take the opportunities to help the educator improve.

Training educators in inclusive practices can be fraught with anxiety because educators tend to want to avoid appearing less than competent. Even when educators want to learn something new, they may not feel comfortable approaching the principal to assist with this new learning. As Leopold said, “When [teachers] are young, they know that if they reach out to the office, they are going to be seen as incompetent.” One approach for training educators who resist inclusive programming is to utilize outside experts. Michaela reported that the specialists she brought in “spent a couple hours with my staff, all my staff, to extend their understanding and learning about kids that have that type of complexity of needs because it’s helpful.”

Occasionally, principals have to have difficult conversations about competence with members of their teaching staff. Leopold described an incident when he had to tell a teacher that she was primarily responsible for inclusion: “Kids aren’t learning the way you are teaching. You are the weak link here.” Leopold said that although the conversation and the subsequent school year were not easy, the experience started everyone on “a different pathway.” Principal Louise related the story of when she counselled a teacher on how to include a student with complex needs on a school trip. The teacher’s enthusiasm for the student’s success rippled out to the rest of the staff because the teacher talked about the student’s success at a staff meeting. Louise described it, saying:

When [the teacher] came back to the school, her first comment was, “You were so right, to watch his face. He was so happy. I can’t believe I thought about leaving him out of this.” And she was so excited about how well it went with this little guy who had a pretty bad rep-

utation at the school already by senior kindergarten ... that she was happy to share ... and so she shared the story at the staff meeting.

The illustrations shared by principals in the study provided evidence of how they supported their teaching staff to competently foster inclusive classrooms. This support was provided to all members of the teaching staff and included a variety of strategies, including problematizing teaching practices that did not reflect inclusion.

Relatedness

In addition to the importance of having competent teachers, the principals in the current study highlighted the importance of supporting their teachers in becoming sensitive and responsive members of the educational community. Teachers arrive at their positions with different capacities for navigating effective professional relationships within school systems. According to the principals in the current study, it often falls on them to support teachers' efforts as they work to find a sense of belonging within educational communities. Michaela relayed that on staff members' birthdays, she handwrites cards to tell them "very specifically about the things that I see that they bring to the school and how that makes a difference in kids' lives." There is more to a sense of relatedness than handwritten cards, however. When asked which practices were essential for developing a community that can handle complex inclusive scenarios, Merryn said that the first step is "letting [teachers] know that you are with them ... that you are going to support them in the best way you can and do what it takes to get them the support that they need." Rochelle noted that building a sense of community for teachers starts at the beginning of the year: "I say to staff right at the beginning, if you feel like running away, that's when you need to run into my office. When you find that you are withdrawing and you're feeling overwhelmed, that's when you need to run in, not out."

Principals are willing to provide support for teacher belongingness because healthy and positive relationships between principals and teachers are important for the difficult conversations that principals sometimes need to have with their teachers. As Nur indicated, "Those kinds of conversations [are] really difficult, messy ones, sometimes." The feedback from the principals consistently reinforced the necessity of nurturing relationships before the need to have those difficult conversations: "It's usually the third or fourth time that I would be really blunt with them ... and then hopefully I have already developed my relationship, my trust with them" Henrietta stated. Louise said that she relies on positive relationships for changing the perspectives and practices of her teaching staff:

When you build those kind of relationships, then when you go to a teacher and say, "Hey, we can't tell that parent their kid can't come. Like, let's talk about this for a minute."... They listen and they change because they value and respect you.... People will trust you even though you are telling them to do something that goes against their tradition or their previous experience.

The support that principals provide for teachers' relationships may extend beyond the school as well. By setting up a top-down collaborative process (which she called

connectivity), Merryn was able to connect teachers with agencies far outside the educational realm. Within the connectivity model, community partners (e.g., police, trauma team, social worker, after-school programmers) formed a school community around the teachers. Merryn explained that, “We kind of present a student and we all talk about how can each of us pitch in to help support.” According to the principals, interagency collaborations are necessary for teacher well-being because the area of education is expected to resolve complex social challenges. Ethan noted that:

There has to be a great partnership with the external agencies because, sometimes, education exhausts the staff and the strategies. And sometimes the strategies might be better served by a medical setting or therapeutic setting and I think that to make inclusion work, to really make it work, [we] need that team, those very perspectives.

Principals take steps in a variety of ways to support their teachers’ sense of belonging because the demands of the job can be taxing on staff members’ well-being. By supporting the development of meaningful connections, principals do what they can to ensure their teachers are well equipped to thrive in their work.

Autonomy

When teachers are able to more or less fully internalize the rationale for inclusive practices (autonomy), they experience that work as volitional and valuable. Bernie called those teachers *champion educators* because they believe that “all students certainly can learn and certainly can learn within a regular neighbourhood school.” Yet, attitudes are often the most challenging change to make. Leopold noted that, “sometimes the hurdle is perception.” Some educators arrive in the profession with autonomously held inclusive-positive attitudes. Leopold also said that “some people just have a heart or a spirit that allows them to be at peace with the idea that students learn differently.” According to the principals in this study, the inclusive attitudes held by teachers that are motivated by controlling factors tend to wither in the face of difficulty. Principals warned that unless the educators actually internalize the rationale for inclusive practices, they may not use inclusive practices in their classroom. Principal Henrietta, for example, described her frustration with educators who “say all the right things; then, when presented a problem that would be inclusive in nature, they’re doing the exact opposite of what they said because they really didn’t believe that.”

Principals further reported that getting teachers to support inclusive practices was the first major obstacle to facilitating inclusive practices. Abram said, “It’s really hard to change staff philosophy about education, inclusion, like anything really.” The principals in the current study noted that there are ways to help educators to internalize inclusive-positive attitudes. Principals themselves must first adopt inclusive-positive attitudes and model those beliefs. Henrietta stated, “First, you have to believe it yourself.” Rochelle reported that she guides her staff the same way she teaches her students:

Because if we are not living it, modelling it, in every interaction that we are having, our staff are going to pick that up ... it’s about being present in the building; it’s being out in the hallway instead of in

your office. It's how you frame discipline. Are you there to be punitive, or are you there to help them learn from their mistakes? Every interaction has to do with inclusion ... so, it's walking the talk. That's what it is.

Types of extrinsic regulation

The approaches used by principals to support teachers' internalization of inclusive practices (buy-in) fall on a spectrum of regulation within extrinsic motivation. In spite of some research that suggests that principals tend to prefer one motivational strategy over others (Eyal & Roth, 2010), five of the principals in the current study reported that they used different strategies and responded dynamically to the attitudes of their teaching staff. (See Table 3 for principals' motivational approaches organized by type of extrinsic regulation.) For example, principals reported that they are willing to have conversations about policy mandates (introjected) when necessary, but they are also willing to help teachers identify the values that relate to inclusive practices (identified) if that was what the teacher required.

Table 3. Motivational approach by type of extrinsic motivation

	External	Introjected	Identified/ Integrated
Louise		✓	
Abram	✓		
Barrett			✓
Leopold			✓
Merryn		✓	
Gerald		✓	✓
Rochelle		✓	✓
Michaela			✓
Aleesha		✓	✓
Primrose	✓	✓	✓
Stephanie		✓	
Chelsie		✓	
Ethan		✓	
Wendy		✓	
Henrietta	✓		✓
Krishan		✓	
Bernie		✓	
Veronica		✓	
Heather			✓
Lonnie			✓
Greg			✓

External regulation approaches

Three of the principals in the current study chose motivational approaches that reflected external regulation. Those principals pointed to job stability and the potential loss of income (separable consequences) as reasons why some teachers support students with special education needs. Stated simply, when teachers did not appear to

have an internalized reason to engage in inclusive practices, principals felt compelled to highlight external consequences with their teachers (*external regulation*). Principals who utilized strategies of external regulation tended to highlight employment contingencies and potential consequences. Henrietta said that when teachers are resistant to inclusive practices, she reminds them that their jobs might be in jeopardy: “This kid brings in the money to pay for your paycheck, so if you don’t want this kid, you don’t want a paycheck.” Abram estimated that about one in ten of his teachers have internalized the value of inclusive practices, while the attitudes of the rest of his teaching staff could be described as, “I got my contract and I am doing [the] status quo.” Primrose reported that “when you come in as a new administrator and you state straightforward[ly] what your non-negotiables are, and this is what we are going to live by, people either get on the bus or they get off the bus or they get run over by the bus.” When educators resist inclusive practices, principals reported that they highlight the negative consequences of not accepting inclusive practices. Nuur said, “You are going to have those that are always going to resist you. ... [They] can stay over there and as long as [they] are not rude and abrasive, we are going to be just fine.” Henrietta’s approach employs external regulation; she told her staff members, “Listen, if you don’t want to do this job, get out, because there’s people who want to do this job.”

Introjected regulation approaches

Thirteen of the principals used introjected regulation approaches with their teaching staffs; introjected regulation is characterized by an internal voice that reminds the individual of what “should” be done. Principals who support teachers with introjected regulation tend to underscore the requirements of the job. For example, when discussing inclusion with a teacher, Ethan noted that the culture of inclusive-positive attitudes that his teachers expressed were based on “the board’s philosophy on inclusive and student services supporting an inclusive environment.” Aleesha used language that emphasized board policy and ministry mandate in her discussions with teachers: “I have a tendency to go with, ‘Let’s take a look at what we are required to do by ministry mandate and by board policy, and then let’s take a look at what we can do and what we *should* do.’” For some principals, motivating teachers for inclusive practices involved formalizing student custody. As Veronica reported: “I inform the teacher that the child is in shared custody between her, the school staff, and her family.”

Identification/integration regulation approaches

Eleven of the principals in the current study used identification/integration approaches when talking with their staff. By connecting inclusive practices to values already held by the teachers, those principals facilitated their teaching staff in identifying the value and importance of those practices. For example, in conversations with her teachers, Michaela encouraged them to “talk about the moral compass.” Gerald said that he pointed out students with special education needs in the community to identify the value of inclusive practices:

And it’s easy when you have examples of someone in the community we can point to and say, “Seriously, you don’t think that student

would be more able to, you know, be part of life if they weren't included in those high school years?"

Discussion

The findings from the current study suggest that while many teachers support inclusive practices, others continue to resist using those practices in their classrooms (DeMatthews, 2015). Discussions between administration and teachers who are resistant to inclusive practices can be difficult for both parties. Principals tend to face difficulties facilitating the social and cultural expressions of inclusion if they do not also have volitional and enthusiastic support from teachers. The interpersonal support provided by principals can have a major role in alleviating job stress and burnout in teachers (Eyal & Roth, 2010), but when principals and teachers disagree about inclusive practices, the consequences can be dire. Not only do those disagreements threaten social trust within the school and weaken supervisor/employee relationships, but some principals have suggested that this difference of opinion is enough to end the employment. In David DeMatthews' (2015) case study, one principal reported that if one of her teachers did not support new inclusive education initiatives, she would encourage the teacher to quit. According to SDT, pressuring employees into particular work behaviours with the threat of termination may supplant autonomous regulation types (integrated, internalized) with controlled regulation types (external, introjected) (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The principals in the current study reported that supporting teachers in fostering inclusion in their classrooms is a key feature of professional development (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2010; McCrimmon, 2015). Teachers, however, may still be anxious about asking principals for help and may not understand that such support is an inherent part of the principal's role. Interestingly, various studies have found that a teacher's self-efficacy is a predictor of a positive attitude around school inclusion in the first place (Frumos, 2018), and that this construct, along with experience, may impact a teacher's attitude toward inclusive practices. Luciana Frumos (2018) discovered that "the self-efficacy dimension variable Efficacy [*sic*] in using instructional strategies [explains] most of the variance in the cognitive dimension of attitudes towards inclusion" (p. 130). In other words, good teaching competencies make a difference. Effective teachers, then, who have strong self-efficacy may need to ask for help less often; but those without the experience and skills to fit into these categories may still be less willing to ask for help and will perhaps be the ones most in need of that supportive leadership. It is clearly important for all staff members to know that the principal has a key role in successful inclusion, and that such principals are likely both interested in—and committed to—supporting teachers in their inclusion journeys (Urton, Wilbert, & Henneman, 2014).

A key message from the principals was the importance of relationships. Regardless of discussions about family, students, or educators, principals were acutely aware that inclusive education was not possible without a solid relationship on which to build. Kristina Llewellyn and Jennifer Llewellyn (2015) discussed the necessity of relationality in education. This perspective includes the notion that people develop both through their relationships and within them. It is only by seeing others as deserving of our respect and care that we develop sound relationships.

The principals in our study highlighted the value of relationships in the critical incidents they shared that shaped their understanding of inclusive education. Research shows that trust builds communities of learners and empowers educators (Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2016; Hollingworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018). When principals have built this trust in relationships with educators, they present themselves as coming from a place of care when difficult conversations about practice are necessary. Elizabeth Kozleski, Ting Yu, Allyson Satter, Grace Francis, and Shana Haines (2015) found that principals facilitate inclusion by building capacity in teams. By providing room for growth in a nurturing way, principals bring the message that the school is moving forward with inclusion and will support teachers as they navigate the difficulties of inclusive practices. Building trusting relationships is also important for bringing parents to the school. In one study of schools and inclusion, Wanda Lyons, S. Anthony Thompson, and Vianne Timmons (2016) indicated that parents discussed the importance of the principal's approachability in feeling welcomed at school. If parents feel respected and believe that the good of their child is at the heart of the matter, they will be more likely to engage. Some research (e.g., Irvine et al., 2010) discusses broad ways to engage parents (e.g., newsletters, meetings, volunteer opportunities). Perhaps there is a unique opportunity in inclusive education to approach and engage families. As one principal noted, parents new to the school are told that there is a diverse range of children and they should expect diversity in their children's classes. These messages are a good model for how the leadership of the school accepts diversity and communicates to all families and students that all children are welcomed. In turn, all students will have a safe and welcoming environment where they can learn.

While some of the principals in the current study appeared to prefer one type of leadership style over another, most of the principals reported that they used more than one approach—not only among various members of the teaching staff but also with individual teachers. The finding that principals use dynamic approaches to respond to the concerns of their teachers may be at odds with the somewhat more static model of leadership put forth by transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory posits that principals use leadership approaches that are transformational or transactional. Transformational leaders use coaching and mentoring approaches to inspire followers to share in the vision and goals for an organization by “elevating their self-esteem, self-value, and social identification” (Eyal & Roth, 2010, p. 257). Transactional leaders may, however, emphasize contractual obligation and contingent rewards to ensure follower compliance. The contrast between transformational and transactional leadership aligns with the framework of autonomy support as described by SDT's motivation spectrum (Ryan & Deci, 2017); transactional leadership instills controlled regulation types (external, introjected) and transformative leadership facilitates autonomous regulation types (identified, integrated). Correlational analyses of the impact of principal leadership styles on teacher motivation and burnout (Eyal & Roth, 2010) suggested that the transformational leadership of principals predicts levels of autonomous motivation of their teachers, which in turn has a negative relationship with teacher burnout. (Inversely, transactional leadership predicts controlled motivation, which also leads to teacher burnout.) In contrast to Ori Eyal and Guy Roth's

(2010) presuppositions that principals remain static within leadership styles and teachers' motivation autonomy is influenced by principal leadership decisions, the current study suggests that principals choose leadership strategies *in response to* the regulation expressed by the teachers.

Limitations

This study is limited in a number of ways. First, it relied on principals' self-reporting of their inclusive practices. Principals may have felt pressure to express inclusive-positive attitudes. Given that inclusive practices are mandated across all provincial and departmental jurisdictions in Canada, it is not surprising that principals would articulate responses that would align with these mandates. Second, the participants in the study were self-selected. As a result, it is likely that those principals who are interested in, and generally supportive of, inclusive education agreed to participate. Third, principals participated in only one interview. The study might have been strengthened by interviewing principals multiple times. Returning to each principal for follow-up interviews would have assisted in the analysis stage of considering varying aspects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Despite its limitations, this study suggests that supporting the development of principals' effective leadership practices should be a priority for school systems as inclusive education is increasingly valued and implemented. The framework of SDT proposed by this study considers how principals support autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The language principals use to discuss inclusion with their teachers may reflect the type of extrinsic regulation that characterizes those teachers' attitudes. The current study suggests that principals support inclusive-positive attitudes and practices by interpreting and responding to the attitudes and behaviours of the members of their teaching staffs. Principals make judgements based on their perceptions of those teachers' attitudes and teaching practices, and they choose regulation strategies they believe will be effective at facilitating inclusive practices.

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IJEPL 17(2) 2021

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